



DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

INFORMATION SERVICE

UNITED STATES FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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TRUMPETER SWAN POPULATION UP TO 735

Aerial surveys this fall indicate that the trumpeter swan population in the United States is 735, the Department of the Interior reports. This figure includes 147 cygnets--young-of-the-year--and 6 swans held in captivity.

The present population is the highest attained since special conservation efforts were established 30 years ago, according to officials of the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife, United States Fish and Wildlife Service. Bureau spokesmen state that this year's increase was principally due to the return of a sizable flock of swans missed last year, increased coverage of the region censused, and excellent production.

The 1955 and 1956 counts of 590 and 588 respectively seemed to indicate that the American flock of trumpeters was stabilizing at about 600 birds. But in 1957 only 488 trumpeter swans were located during the annual census, an apparent loss of 100 birds. Bureau officials considered the low count in 1957 as a failure to locate all the birds rather than mortality in the population. The recent sighting of 735 trumpeters confirms this belief and indicates that only normal losses occurred in 1957. A similar "loss" occurred in 1950 when the count for that year was much lower than could be accounted for. But in 1951, as in 1958, the population figure bounced back to show a higher than expected net gain indicating that in 1950, too, the birds had apparently moved out of the region censused.

In addition to the increased trumpeter population, the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife reports that in 1958 trumpeter cygnets were produced for the first time on the Malheur (Oregon) National Wildlife Refuge and for the first confirmable time on Ruby Lake (Nevada) National Wildlife Refuge. Bureau officials interpret these hatchings as an indication of success in their long efforts to establish new nesting flocks of wild trumpeters on these two western refuges. Current transplanting efforts include moving cygnets and nonbreeding birds from the Red Rock Lakes Migratory Waterfowl Refuge in Montana. Some of the older birds are held to their new habitat for a year by wing-clipping. The previous unsuccessful method utilized older birds which were permanently "grounded" by pinioning.

The largest unit of the American flock of trumpeters is on Red Rock Lakes Refuge in southwestern Montana which was established as a refuge for these birds in 1935. There were 310 trumpeters on the Lakes at the time of the 1958 survey and 116 in adjacent areas, making the total trumpeter population in Montana 426. In Wyoming, 150 trumpeters were counted while Idaho held 97. The balance were found in other western States. Of the total, 108 were located on Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks and 101 were located on the Gallatin, Targhee and National Forests.

The trumpeter weighs about 25 pounds and has an eight-foot wingspread. At one time it existed on the continent by the thousands, but commercial traffic in plumage and unrestricted hunting practically eliminated the species. In fact, in 1900 the species was considered extinct by some eastern naturalists. Since the Red Rock Lakes Refuge was established, this species has been increased steadily.

Although trumpeters once travelled across the continent twice each year on seasonal migrations, their present movements are much more restricted. In recent years, however, color banding has shown that there is some migration into the United States from the Canadian flock located some 800 to 900 miles northward in Alberta. A breeding population of trumpeters was newly discovered in the Copper River country in Alaska in 1956 and, more lately, trumpeters have been observed to nest on the Kenai National Moose Range in Alaska. Little is known of the migrational tendencies of the Alaskan flocks, but it appears that these birds winter in British Columbia where numbers are seen each season.

Two trumpeters were received by the National Zoological Park in Washington, D. C. from Red Rock Lakes in the summer of 1957 and are presently being exhibited near the Bird House. Two other trumpeters, casualties of hunter violations of regulations protecting these birds, are kept by the municipal zoo in Idaho Falls, Idaho, and two are on display in the Lincoln, Nebraska, zoo.

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